

Scabies

What is scabies?

Scabies is a common contagious skin disease caused by tiny parasites called mites.

What are the symptoms of scabies?

Scabies mites burrow under the skin causing skin irritation, severe itchiness, and small bumps that look like pimples. These pimples, which contain fluid, resemble wavy lines and appear frequently between the fingers or on the wrists, elbows, armpits, breasts, waist, genitalia, thighs, nipples, lower buttocks, and abdomen. Itchiness is intense, especially at night. A rash may also occur anywhere on the body.

How does a person get scabies?

A person can get scabies by touching the skin of someone who has it; scabies is transmitted through direct skin-to-skin contact with an infested person. Scabies can also be spread from one person to another by touching the clothing or bedding of someone who is infested. Since this disease is spread through skin-to-skin contact, it can be transmitted through sexual contact.

How soon do scabies symptoms appear?

Scabies symptoms usually appear 2 to 6 weeks following a person's first exposure. A person who has been exposed more than once may experience symptoms within 1 to 4 days after a subsequent re-exposure. It is important to remember that an infested person can still spread scabies to others even when they have no symptoms.

How long is a person able to spread scabies to others?

An infested person is able to spread scabies until all mites and mite eggs are destroyed by treatment. Ordinarily, a person is no longer contagious 24 hours after receiving their first treatment.

How is scabies diagnosed?

A doctor can determine a scabies diagnosis. In order to see if a person has scabies the doctor sometimes scrapes off pieces of skin and looks for the scabies mites under a microscope. Sometimes the doctor can diagnose scabies just by looking at the person's skin.

How can scabies be prevented?

Avoiding physical contact with infested individuals and their belongings, especially clothing and bedding, can prevent scabies. Early diagnosis along with the proper treatment of infested persons and contacts can prevent a scabies outbreak.

What is the treatment for scabies?

Medications used to treat scabies are called *scabicides* because they kill scabies mites; some also kill eggs. Scabies can be treated with Ivermectin (an oral medication) or Permethrin (a body cream). 5% Permethrin is recommended for infants and toddlers. A doctor will help decide which treatment is best. Instructions provided by the doctor, pharmacist, and medication label should always be followed exactly; overtreatment can be toxic. Infested persons should be treated with a prescription product as soon as possible after diagnosis. There are no over-the-counter treatments for scabies. Medication(s) intended for animals should never be used to treat humans.

For adults, the scabies cream or lotion medication must be applied everywhere on the body except for the head and neck; on infants and young children it must be applied to the whole body, including the head and neck. The medication needs to be left on the body for the recommended amount of time and then washed off by bathing or showering; clean clothes should be worn after treatment. Bedding, clothing, underclothes and linens should be laundered and heat dried. Personal items that are not easily washed and dried should be kept in a closed plastic bag for a minimum of 5 days. Mop floors and vacuum carpets and furniture.

An infested person should avoid social situations, including work or school, until 24 hours after the first treatment. It is normal for itching to persist for 1-2 weeks after treatment. If itching continues after 2-4 weeks re-treatment may be necessary.

Scabies treatment is recommended for household members and sexual contacts of the infested person(s); everyone should be treated at the same time in order to prevent re-infection.

For more information about scabies go to:
<http://cdc.gov/scabies/>